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THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR A METHODIST THEODICY

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The Historical Basis for a Methodist Theodicy

What is truth? Truth, as it is commonly known, is little more than the acceptance of the majority opinion of the most thoughtful of any age. Under this interpretation that which we know to be truth is variable. Witchcraft was at one time one of the settled verities of New England. There was a time when the world was flat. Columbus needed much courage to sail Westward when only a few of the leading geographers of his age entertained the conception that the world was round. Not so long ago men would have denied the fact of the circulation of the blood. Even today men of fair intelligence ridicule the bacterial origin of disease.

When Franklin, by the aid of his kite, paved the way for the utilization of the vast stores of electricity, he little dreamed of the possibilities that he was then bringing within the reach of the genius of man. Imagine his astonishment if he could step upon the stage of action and see its multiplied use today. In the American home we see it furnishing heat and light, besides the power to run the vacuum cleaner, the churn, the wood saw, the sewing machine, and doubtless it will soon be keeping the cradle in motion, and in addition, furnish fuel for cooking and by the aid of the telephone connect each fire-side with every other home on the continent. In the world at large factories, trains, sausage mills, and shoe shops, together with unnumbered industries, are utilizing it. It has made the ocean a neighborhood. A missionary of the South Sea casually expressed

the wish to the Captain of the ship that he might know if his wife had sailed. A few minutes later the Captain returned and told the missionary the exact hour his wife had sailed, the name of her ship, the port for which she was bound, the hour she would arrive, and the exact location of her ship on the sea at that very moment.

Now we see wireless telegraphy playing its decisive part in engagements on the ocean, while the S. O. S. within a few minutes, converges a score of ships in mid ocean at a common point of distress. And these, together with aerial squadrons are now deciding the future of civilization. These achievements lay so far outside the pale of possibility that had a man even suggested them a half century ago, he would have been held for a commission on lunacy.

Truth, as we know it, at least, changes. No strange beasts any longer reside at the jumping-off places of the earth. It is no longer unsafe to pass by a grave-yard alone. The buck-eye and the rabbit foot have lost their conjuring power. Systems of government are constantly changing, the last one the only correct one, of course. The fashion of an age, in dress, in creed, in manners, and in opinion, sets the standard,---these are for that age its interpretation of the truth. Training and environment have much to do in deciding what sort of interpretation of truth will be made by any particular individual. For instance, a rosary may mean as much to a devout Catholic today as a wooden god did to a Chinaman a thousand years ago. Both interpretations are explained by the matter of indoctrination.

In the exact sciences, this shifting of truth does not occur. Two times two are four and the sides of an equilateral triangle are equal. The time will never come when this relationship of values can change. But apart from mathematical exactness, thought has been and probably will continue to be in a state of flux. Each new age sends the ultimate truths of the preceeding age to the scrap-pile and makes discoveries and gives values of its own. Out of these cataclysms of mental processes through successive ages

there has been a residue, a survival, a persistence, of thought that bears the strongest credentials to truth; those ideas that have found a foot-hold in the human mind through the centuries and even among diverse races.

Absolute truth belongs alone to the Deity. Christ was, therefore, the only perfect teacher the world has known or ever can know. And the secret of His wisdom was His divinity. His mind was the only unprejudiced mind and the only one that had a proper appreciation of respective values. He is the only one who could say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Therefore, all theology, philosophy, and sociology, together with our ethical and moral standards, must be submitted to his teaching as the court of final appeal. And while each creed claims to have done that very thing, the trouble is there has been a wrong interpretation placed upon what the Master said, or did.

Hence Theology is the queen of the sciences, from the simple reason that the religious life is of paramount importance. If the world is gained at the cost of a soul, a fool's bargain has been made. While it is interesting to know something about the construction of a molecule and the chemical analysis of an atom, it is of far more importance to know something of the Maker of a universe.

And this is particularly true just at this time when there is great danger that all doctrine may be swamped. For beautiful as is the sight of Jew, Catholic, and Protestant, joining hands in ministrations to the dying, a peace of creeds that compromises the Deity, or His Son, can find no analogous folly save in a peace with the Hun that compromises the future rights of mankind. There can be no strength in a man or a nation without convictions; but convictions rest upon a stable creed, and no man or nation has ever risen above the high-water mark of its creed. While it is America's mission to conserve the rights and liberties of mankind, it is the province of Protestantism to keep alive correct religious conceptions in the world.

Buying Liberty Bonds and contributing to the Red

Cross must characterize saint and sinner alike. To repent, believe in the efficacy of the blood of Christ and live a consistent life is essential to salvation. Dying as a good soldier on the field of battle may win earthly fame without pressing through the portals into a heavenly immortality. Camouflage may be a wise practice in dealing with the Hun, but it is futile in dealing with powers and principalities. We do not need any camouflaged religion!

The meeting houses of the Puritans, the altars of the Cavaliers, the log churches of the South and West, paved the way for the moral grandeur of our Great Republic at this good day. If the smoke of incense should fade from this Western horizon, it will prove that the life that has animated a great nation in the making has departed at the hour of Her glory.

The study of theology, then, is not the mastering of a superfluous science, it is keeping alive the thought centers that will bring to a more glorious destiny. It does make a difference what we believe. Paul said: "There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

The inventive genius of man has provided many comforts to brighten, soften, and refine life. But it remains for religion to furnish consolation, inspiration, and hope, amidst the hours of gloom, and the moral standards for social, domestic, civil, national, and international life. Besides, we live in the tomorrows and they are the creatures of our devotions. So, we are not only to worship, but we are to give heed how we worship. If our belief was a matter of indifference, then the coming of Christ was a mistake, his teachings unnecessary, and revelation superfluous.

Our Church, being the last great branch of the Church of God and embodying in her tenets **the last word** in the

evolution of human interpretation and at the same time bringing forward the tried beliefs from the earliest formulated creeds, believes that she has a mission in the world. She is still in her prime. The dew of youth is fresh upon her. Her position has struck such a response in the truthward instincts of mankind that in America a larger number have given their adherence to her than to any other Protestant body. The faith that we hold today is the result of the attrition of many minds and the soliloquizings of many a dead saint. Pathfinders of truth, with sad hearts, have climbed the intellectual and spiritual mountain of difficulty, often longing for the light of truth that flashes upon the plateau that you and I inhabit today. Peace to their ashes! The world is better for their having lived.

Even the controversies of the centuries have furnished a flame for the consuming of the dross, so that we come to see more accurately what really is true. Yet, this furnishes no apology for seeking to learn no more. As we are indebted to the past, so are we debtors to the future. David would say to us today as he did to Solomon, "If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee." By seeking the as yet uncommitted truths, old truths will be revived and the past will be made vital in the present. While every other door of human approach stands wide open, is there a reason that the door to God should stand shut? Or, is it reasonable that God would permit men to learn the secrets of the universe and at the same time desire to conceal himself more from the hearts of men? If there has been, and can be, no clarification of thought in the interpretation of the things of God, then the theological seminaries of the world had best be closed; this study is a waste of time, men and money. But fortunately the development of theology as a science refutes such an assumption.

All sciences have growth; there is something of an analogy in their respective processes. This fact is established by a series of lectures delivered by Sir Archibald Geike before the Johns Hopkins University on the "Foun-

ders of Geology." In the first paragraph of his first lecture, he says: "In science, as in all other departments of human knowledge and inquiry, no thorough grasp of a subject can be gained, unless the history of its development is clearly appreciated. While eagerly pressing forward in the search after the secrets of Nature, we are apt to keep the eye too constantly fixed on the way that has to be travelled, and to lose sight and remembrance of the paths already trodden. Yet, it is eminently useful now and then to pause in the race, and to look backward over the ground that has been traversed, to mark the errors as well as the successes of the journey, to note the hindrances and the helps which we and our predecessors have encountered, and realize what have been the influences that have more especially tended to retard or quicken the progress of research." In the next paragraph he further remarks, "A retrospect of this kind leads to a clearer realization of the precise position at which we have arrived, and a wider conception of the extent and limits of the domain or knowledge which he has been acquired."

How well Sir Achibald brought forward in swift panoramic review, the eminent scientists with their respective contributions, from the Cosmogonists--Leibnitz and Buffon--on down and including Guettard, Desmarest, Agassiz and Lyell, only the book can tell. Suffice it to say, a similar application of method to each of the various avenues of knowledge, including Theology, would give to the common man a concise and complete library that would make Dr. Elliott's five foot book shelf look like a crazy quilt in classic lore.

It would indeed be interesting to trace the evolution of the human interpretation of doctrine from Origen (Born 185 A. D., in Alexandra) to the present, giving attention to the influences that preceded Christianity, and also taking into consideration, geographical, social, and political influences under which minds functioned. While we repudiate Bauer who gives to Seneca more credit for Christianity than to Jesus, we are still impressed with the powerful and subtle in-

fluences that may have crept into the life of the early Church. Probably not an incident in a thousand years had occurred that did not have its effect upon the state of mind of the age into which Christ was born, and to this extent influence the human interpretation of what He taught and did. This doubtless made it necessary for Paul to write certain of his letters to the early churches to correct just such wrong interpretations.

Paul told the simple truth when he said he was "debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." We are all debtors to the past. Moses was indebted to the Pharaohs for the human side of his culture. But fortunately for the world he received his post-graduate course, not at a German university, but beneath the lamp of a burning bush where God spake in the wilderness solitudes.

The foundation of a real theology was laid when God spoke to Moses and commanded him to "say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." Monotheism, then, was the earliest triumph of doctrine. Today, the religious prognosis of a people may be made from their interpretation of the Deity. And it is worthy of note that when God revealed Himself to Moses, He did so, not as the God of the **future**, but the God of the **present**. "I Am," is His own interpretation of Himself.

Without following, at length, the stream of thought from Sinai to Bethlehem, it is well to note the environment in which the Savior was born. And especially the fact that civilization at this time had reached a high point in its history. For instance, the library at Alexandria contained seven hundred thousand volumes. America has rediscovered the hot air systems used by the Romans a century before Christ was born; dentistry was being practiced; bank cheques were in vogue; Atticus was busy making and selling books; while a cartoonist represented Nero as a butterfly driving the fiery steeds of the chariot of state. Luxury, idleness, divorce, race suicide, and all the other concomi-

tants of civilization obtained then as now.

Yet, there were many marks of spiritual life. The trade of procurer was considered loathsome; Dio Chrysostom attacked the legalization of prostitution; and Greek dramatists emphasized the fact that any theory of destiny which thwarted freewill subverted moral responsibility. Socrates discovered the intuitive road to knowledge. "For positive truth there is no process; our knowledge of it is **immediate** or **instinctive**, coming by feeling rather than by proof." He also extended the practice of self-examination which had been begun by Pythagoras. By introducing the era of subjectivity, he paved the way for Augustine's Confessions in the fourth century A. D.

Precedents for preaching are found among the philosophers. Men attended lectures and went forth to disseminate knowledge. The Cynics introduced street preaching, thus ante-dating our modern evangelists. Nor was this all, the character of their message was serious. Porphyry took the ground that the aim of philosophy should be "the salvation of the soul." Private chaplains ministered to the great Romans and "discussed the questions of life, death, immortality, and reunion."

Some of the philosophic preachers were very earnest. It has been said that "the preaching at least of Apollonius seems to belong to the world of reality." Of Musonius Rufus, it was said, "he used to speak in such a manner that each of us who heard him supposed that some person had accused us to him; he so hit upon what was done by us and placed the faults of every one before his eyes." It is further affirmed of him that "he inculcated forgiveness, kindness, purity, and self-examination."

Christianity is not a distinct gift to the world, apart from any evolving thought, but it is contended nevertheless that "in each of the epochs the prevailing interpretation of Christianity has corresponded to the special characteristics of time and race." Men cannot change the truth, but they can interpret erroneously. Thus error becomes ac-

cepted for truth. Theology must correct these errors.

Apologetic Theology, defending the truth without and within, furnishes the earliest specimens of Christian doctrine. Epiphanius describes at least eighty heretical sects. So that with Mormonism, Christian Science, and Unitarianism, it would seem that we have no more heresy than was in the church just after its beginning.

The Fathers of the first and second centuries---Irenaeus, Hippolitus, and Tertullian---were the first to assemble material for a history of doctrine.

Clement should be mentioned here, not because he formulated into consistent whole his theological ideas, but because he made a number of good suggestions, his writings influenced Origen and he anticipated our doctrine of Justification by Faith. He thought that the religion of Christ could be given a scientific form. And he took the very high ground that anything that casts dishonor on God is unworthy of belief, that the two sources of knowledge of Divine things are the Scriptures and reason.

That Clement did foreshadow our doctrine of Justification by Faith may be seen by examining his own words: "And so we, having been called through His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified through ourselves or through our own wisdom or understanding or piety, or works which we wrought in holiness of heart, but through faith, whereby the Almighty God justifies all men that have been from the beginning."

Origen has the distinction of being the author of "the earliest systematic treatise on doctrinal theology." He was born in 185 A. D. Besides having a Christian parentage, he had a classical and a religious education. His "Reply to Celsus" was a defense of Christianity against one of its ablest assailants. While being well acquainted with all the philosophical schools of thought, he was nevertheless a scriptural theologian and maintained that nothing should be received which was contrary to the Scriptures, or to legitimate deductions from them.

While admitting that God is partly revealed in nature, he recognized that the Deity is incomprehensible. He further observed that the exercise of such attributes as omnipotence and righteousness were conditioned on creation. For to be righteous, other than in a potential sense, it was necessary that there should be things over which He could righteously rule. As to the omnipotence of God, he held that this omnipotence must be eternally exercised. This conclusion needs no argument in our day, for it is evident that if the Deity should withdraw His presence but for a moment, disaster would overtake the universe.

Methodism is profoundly interested in this founder of systematic theology, for it is to Origen that we are indebted for the clear development of the doctrine of the Freedom of the Will. He maintained that the Deity can set limitations upon the exercise of His own attributes, and cites the restrictions which Deity has placed upon His own pre-science in order to leave unimpaired the liberty of the human will.

Origen vigorously opposed Fatalism. Election and Predestination could find no basis in his system upon which to rest. Therefore, we think of Origen as holding out the historic signboard leading to the goodly theological heritage that we enjoy today.

The influence of Origen in Alexandria was very great; this influence was perpetuated there by Dionysius, one of his most eminent pupils. Dionysius was bishop from 248 to 268 A. D., and during this period replied to Bishop Nepos, the Egyptian, who wrote in behalf of Chilianism.

Athanasius, in his treatise on the Decree of the Nicene Council and his article on "The Opinion of Dionysius," defended Origen's orthodoxy. Athanasius also wrote on the Trinity. Hilary, also, who was bishop from 350 to 368, supported the Athanasian theology, which, as we have noted was inspired by Origen.

Rufinus, an Italian theologian, who lived from 340 to

410 A. D., besides being the translator of Origen, wrote an "Exposition of the Apostolic Symbol."

Even Ambrose, who lived from 340 to 398, and who became Archbishop of Milan, was indebted to Origen, Athanasius and Basil, for many of his theological views. Yet, by the views he came to hold with reference to sin and the relation of the will to grace, he paved the way for Augustine, thus ultimately for that school of theology so diametrically opposed to Arminianism---Calvinism.

This brings us to the water-shed of early religious thought. Up to this point there can be no doubt but that the great weight of thought on fundamental doctrine was in keeping with the truth as our church holds it today.

Augustine's controversy with Pelagius doubtless caused him to accentuate his views, thus giving rise to that great school of doctrine that we must think contains much of error. We therefore pause to examine the sources of the Augustinian views. In this way, only, can we account for the presence of Calvinism as a creed. "Tertullian, more than any other, is the founder of Latin theology. He deserves to be called the forerunner of Augustine." But who was Tertullian? "He was partly Latin and partly African, and he blended in himself the qualities of his mixed parentage." While he disdained philosophers, it is said, "his power as a thinker is not less marked than his extravagance." He was a Traducian as opposed to the belief that each soul is originated by a distinct creative act. He held to a materialistic conception of the soul, claiming that it was of finer species than matter, but that it had color and form and was of seminal beginning.

Two things must be said to his credit, he was the first to use the word "Trinity," and to assert the tri-personality of God. He gave no ground for the position of Calvinism on the freedom of the will. He taught that "the freedom of the will is a part of God's image and likeness in man." While his position on inborn corruption, which anticipates Augustine, is qualified, in some places it is excluded.

Other influences were brought to bear on Augustine. One of these was Manicheism. This system of thought, teaching that matter is inherently evil, originated with a Persian in A. D., 245. Its foundation rested in the Semitic or Babylonian religion. At the head of the system there were twelve Apostles called the "elect," below them were the "auditors" or novices. When it is recalled that for **nine years** Augustine was an "auditor", some light may be thrown upon his later views.

But these two sources of influence were not all, his knowledge of Greek and Latin writers, his period of skepticism and despondency, the Sermons of Ambrose, the Dialectics of Aristotle, New Platonism, the Scriptures, and particularly his conversion.

His theology may be glimpsed from his theodicy. He claims that God has not left "even the entrails of the smallest and most insignificant animal, or the feathers of a bird, or the little flower of a plant, or the leaf of a tree, without harmony, and, as it were a mutual peace among all its parts,---that God can never be believed to have left the kingdoms of men, their dominations and servitudes, outside of the laws of his Providence."

He takes the position that the will of God is never defeated. Origen would doubtless raise the question as to how far the Divine will was already made up. This was exactly the reason Origen took the position that the Deity limited His own knowledge in behalf of Freedom of the Will. Who was right? That is the question before us now.

Augustine assumed that "when evil exists, God permits it and wills to permit it. "And he came to hold to an unconditional view of absolute predestination. To his credit, it must be said, that in his distress as to what should become of unbaptized children, he called in Jerome to help him. And further it should be recalled that just after his conversion he held to a conditional predestination, a reserve power in the will, and the ability of man to exercise faith of himself.

Opposed to Augustine, and in line with our evolving theology was Pelagius, a monk, but a man of strict and austere morality. Pelagius' view of unfallen man was that man was qualified for right or wrong action through a complete inherent capacity. He considered the freedom of the will to consist in the power of alternate choice, an inalienable power of contrary choice. Feeling the importance of human responsibility, he found fault with a sentence in Augustine's Confessions: "Give what Thou commandest and command what Thou wilt." Pelagius besides being a student of Origen, was also a student of Justin. Justin had not only repudiated Stoic fatalism but had emphasized the liberty and the responsibility of the will. More than this, Justin had opposed predestination and had taught fore-knowledge. In both of these views he was supported by Irenaeus.

Pelagius interpreted grace as facilitating the right action of the will, but maintained that the power of accepting or rejecting was left to the individual.

Julian, the Pelagian, based arguments upon a sense of justice implanted in every heart by the Deity, which protests against a doctrine that blames, condemns, and punishes us for that which we could not prevent.

The Antiochians, in their system, as expounded by Theodore, emphasized the fact that the Freedom of the Will holds a central place in doctrine, and that character presupposes a free exercise of moral choice.

John Cassianus, a Semi-Pelagian, who lived about 434 A. D., while conscious of the tendency to sin, and the need of grace, did not consider the disposition to sin equivalent to guilt. He also asserted the cooperative agency of the will in conversion.

Faustus, Bishop of Rhegium, who lived in the latter part of the fifth century, was an advocate of the Semi-Pelagian doctrine. By the force of his arguments he caused Lucidus, an extreme predestinationist, to retract his opinion at the council of Arles in 475.

New impetus was given to the doctrine, when Posses-

sor, an African Bishop, in 519, cited Faustus as authority in support of his Semi-Palagianism. Certain Sythian monks sought a verdict against his orthodoxy, but Hormisdas, Bishop of Rome (514-553) gave them no satisfaction. While they appealed to the North African Bishops, then in Sardinia and Corsica, it may be recorded that the Synod of Valence, which met in 529 did not antagonize the Semi-Pelagian opinion.

True, the Synod of Arles, which met a little later in the same year, was Anti-Pelagian in its creed, but it was exceedingly cautious in condemning Semi-Pelagianism. Some of its findings leaned towards our position. For instance, it denied predestination to sin; it made no affirmation of unconditional election or irresistible grace; it would only admit that Free-Will was "weakened" in Adam. The question then arises as to whether or not its admissions were not equal to affirmations. These findings were sanctioned by the Roman Bishop, Boniface II.

Bishop Hilary, of Arles, was another dissenter from Augustine. Jerome, himself, the chaperone of the Augustinian cause, should be called as a witness against himself. He admitted a remaining freedom in the will, nor did he accept the tenets of absolute election and irresistible grace.

Perhaps Jerome was a Semi-Pelagian, if he had only known it. Doubtless there have been many disciples of Augustine and Calvin to grow spiritually and intellectually strong by tapping Semi-Pelagian truth via Arminius. Let it be so! We should remember the words of Jesus to the Jews: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

By this time the two fundamental creeds had become fairly well formulated. The time for promulgation had arrived. But there were historic movements about this time that imperiled creed and civilization. The Slavonic invaders were overcoming the Eastern Empire; the Teutons were overcoming the West. About the end of the sixth and the

beginning of the seventh centuries the Persians ravaged the Asiatic provinces; the Mohammedans overcame the three patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria.

Strange as it may seem, in the early part of the Middle Ages, there was more theological life in Spain than anywhere else in the world. England, in the eighth century, enjoyed more culture than any country in Europe save Italy. Tarsus, the first Archbishop of Canterbury (668-690) established schools in which Greek was taught. Bede wrote an Ecclesiastical History of the English, Alcinus, an Englishman, founded the cathedral and cloister schools in 782.

Here one sees the benefit of missions. Rome had taken the gospel to England; from thence it had been carried to Germany, and thus the Franks were prepared against the day of their ascendancy over the Aryan race. So by the alliance with the popes there was the crystalization of empire under Charlemagne, and a consequent check on illiteracy and at the same time a stimulus was given to theology and civilization.

In the flight of years over which we have just come, one event will show that theological thought was not dead. In 846 A. D., Gottschalk, a monk of Orbais, attempted to combat Semi-Pelagianism by proclaiming the Augustian doctrine of election. The first Synod of Chiersy in 849, condemned, scourged, and sentenced him to life imprisonment in a cloister. While this treatment was unjust and cruel, it at least shows the temper of the ninth century touching the doctrine of predestination.

With the breaking up of the Carlovingian Empire, anarchy ensued, the papacy became divided into factions, Latin disappeared as the language of the people, and the schools decayed. The Dark Age had come.

Theology once more held the key to civilization. As missions by way of England to Germany had saved Europe from a night of intellectual and spiritual oblivion, deliverance came via the Arabs in Spain who had in turn been taught Greek by the Christians in Syria. These Arabians had

founded the college of Cordova in 980. Their interest in philosophy had been quickened by a study of Aristotle. Thus was paved the way for the Scholastic Era.

Scholasticism brought with it two dangers, skepticism and mysticism. In the one case not being able to verify doctrines by reason, produced skeptics; on the other hand to ascribe to mystery what could not be understood produced mystics. However, Scholasticism gave attention to such important matters as the attributes of God, the relation of the finite to the Deity, and **therelation of freedom to contingency**. The Mystics not only hurried up the Reformation by their consistent living and their emphasis on "the inwardness of true religion," but they anticipated our doctrine, "The Witness of the Spirit," by theirs, "The birth of God in the soul."

Luther undoubtedly anticipated our doctrine of "Justification by Faith." Yet his "**justia interior**--inward righteousness," which was given out in 1516, was influenced largely by the Mystics. In his experience he almost encroached upon our doctrine of "The Witness of the Spirit." He defines his Justification by Faith, as "A certain sure confidence of heart and firm assent by which Christ is apprehended, etc."

Luther had a mighty good experience to hold such a wrong doctrine, perhaps his inconsistency in his belief saved him. In replying to Erasmus, who had defended Semi-Pelagianism in his book **De Servo Arbitrio**, Luther emphasized the hopeless impotency of the will and the far reaching domination of the Deity, not only in religious, but also in secular affairs. Predestination was extended to all and was absolutely unconditional. "By this thunderbolt," he said, "Free-will is laid low and thoroughly crushed."

But Luther's "thunderbolt" did not keep his friends in line. Melancthon began to seek a basis for human freedom as a basis for human responsibility. The Augsburg Confession admitted that man has some liberty "to work a civil righteousness, and to choose such things as reason can reach to."

To his credit we should record that Luther admitted, inconsistently, of course, that God desires the salvation of all men, and that if they are not saved it is their fault. All of his followers, however, did not admit so much. Flacius took the position that the will is spiritually dead with no power but to resist grace.

Zwingli took the ground that Providence included the first sin as well as all others. His Predestination gives protection to the children of the righteous, and hope for the children of the heathen. His conception of Original Sin is seen in his claim that the children of Adam are not guilty, but that a disorder obtains: "**Morbus est et conditio.**"

Strigel, a Professor at Jena, and the champion of the Philippists, maintained that the will has been so crippled by the fall that it is incapable of originating anything good save when moved upon by the Spirit, but that it can co-operate in the work of conversion.

Calvin precipitated the most historic moment in the history of theology. In clarifying the creed of his school of thought, he unintentionally caused to be precipitated the views of his antagonists in orderly form.

Calvin makes God's foreknowledge dependent upon His decrees. Hence, God not only saw the fall of Adam's posterity, but arranged it all by the determination of His own will. "It is a terrible decree, I acknowledge," said Calvin. Yet, he does not shrink from the logic of his position, or seek to evade it by subterfuge. With him destiny is a closed book. God has already determined "whom He would admit to salvation and whom He would condemn to destruction." He did yield a point in behalf of the children of the elect who died unbaptized, but he was embarrassed on account of the situation of the children not elected.

This position was not without opposition during his life time. Albert Pighins, a Roman Catholic Bishop of Utrecht, claimed the doctrine to be destructive of morality. Jerome Balsac, a physician of Geneva, was imprisoned and

afterwards banished because of his hostility to the doctrine of unconditional election.

After Calvin's death the revolt against his doctrine increased. His followers were divided into two schools. The Supralapsarians who taught that the fall of man was due to an efficient decree. And the Infralapsarians who made the decree to relate to the fall only in a **permissive** way.

According to the view of the Supralapsarians the divine government needs no other justification than will of God. It was this extreme school of Calvinistic thought that called James Arminius, Professor in the University of Leyden, a student of Beza, who had accepted the Supralapsarian view, to represent them in stemming the revolt being led by Koornheert and others. The investigation upon which he entered converted him to the contrary school of thought that now bears his name. As with General Lew Wallace, who went forth to secure evidence sustaining him in infidel opinions and who was converted and wrote Ben Hur, so was it with Arminius.

No higher tribute to the truth of our position could be had than the complete change of place of the one our ancient adversaries deemed able to bear their banners to victory. His early death, in 1609, robbed the theological world of much intellectual light that he might have given.

His successor at the University of Leyden, Episcopius, carried on the work so faithfully begun. In this, he was dressed to the States of Holland and West Friesland, were as follows:

1st. Conditional election depending on the foreknowledge of faith.

2nd. Universal atonement, intended, if not efficient, for all.

3rd. Inability of man to exercise saving faith save through the office of the Holy Spirit.

4th. Grace, essential, but not irresistible, throughout the spiritual life.

5th. Perseverance of all believers uncertain.

This position was met by the Synod of Dort which convened in 1618.

Thus, looking backward, we see that from the earliest formulation of beliefs into creeds and their systematization into theological doctrines, from Origen to Pelagius, from Pelagius to Semi-Pelagianism, from Semi-Pelagianism to Mysticism, from Mysticism to Arminianism, truth has been moving steadily forward.

Doubtless our doctrines have been modified in the making by concessions to different creeds. Yet we still hold out an open door of salvation to all; we teach that men may be justified by faith; and that great doctrine re-dedicated by our great founder we shall never cease to emphasize "The Witness of the Spirit."

Without elaborating more at length upon the evolution of the Distinctive Doctrines of Methodism, with which you are all familiar, it might be well to suggest that we undertake the unfinished task of giving to the world a consistent Christian Theodicy.

This suggestion is made with the more earnestness because no other school of theology furnishes so much ground for hope.

Synthetic Theology may become the acid test of truth in the future. Chemistry has long since seized upon the synthetic process; medicine is availing itself of this method to-day. Different attributes of the Deity look good separately, but will they bear the synthetic test of binding them together in unity? If not, the weak point may be disclosed thus affording opportunity for correction. Certain it is that all truth must be self consistent, and any arguments that cast reflection upon the Holiness of God must be discarded as *prima facie* false.

A tentative inquiry may be seriously entered upon, not in an arbitrary fashion, but that the human mind may discover that for which the hearts of men have hungered in all ages. A pathfinder must assist in the inquiry rather than by making dogmatic affirmations.

Your intelligence assures you that all doctrinal truth must be discovered in the light of a true conception of the Deity and His attributes. It is at this point that your attention is to be focused. Taken separately each attribute appears to be properly defined. Combined there appears to be a contradiction between the doctrine of Omniscience and the divine Holiness.

The Calvinistic school of theology, makes all future events depend on the decrees of God, which makes Him the direct author of every blasphemy committed by the profligate sons of men, and hence nullifies the doctrine of Holiness. The Arminian system seeks to avoid this conclusion by limiting Omniscience to a passive fore-knowledge. This is an admission on the part of our system of theology that the former interpretation is wrong. Therefore the question arises, have we gone far enough? If men are convicted in the courts of earth on account of guilty knowledge under the law of **particeps criminis**, shall the Lord of the universe go free? Besides, granting the fore-knowledge of God, based on decrees or merely the passive prescience of coming events, how can either interpretation lead to anything but fatalism?

Therefore it would appear that our Church should attend now, as she has in the past, to that interpretation of the Omniscience of the Deity that will at the same time protect the Free Agency of man and the Holiness of God. Does the admission of a passive fore-knowledge do this? Was this position reached without a measure of compromise under the constant pressure of a contrary school of thought? And does our interpretation go far enough to make effective the very things for which we have contended?

Synthetically, may it not be asked if the fact of free agency does not preclude the possibility of a fore-knowledge touching the free acts of that being? Or, if there is a fore-knowledge, either necessitated or permitted, upon that basis of fact could it still be affirmed that the agent is free? Does freedom consist in the fact that we go to the fulfillment of

deeds already known? Or, does freedom consist in the fact that we go to the fulfillment of deeds, not known to Deity, and possibly not yet known to ourselves?

Likewise, under the synthetic test, is there an absolute consistency between our doctrine of the passive fore-knowledge of God and our gospel of Universal Hope,—that all may be saved? If it is really true that all may be saved, how then can the passive fore-knowledge of God still obtain, together with this element of doubt and uncertainty and possibility, at one and the same time? If it should be affirmed that God fore-knows the fore-knowable in a passive way, would it also be contended that He fore-knows the possible courses of free agents, who themselves have not yet decided, and whose decisions are depending on contingent circumstances? In this case where would freedom begin and where would it end?

Possibly it will aid us to answer the questions already raised by asking others with reference to the Deity:

1. Can God change His mind?
2. If He cannot change His mind is this an impugnement of His Omnipotence?
3. If we, who are created like God, can change our minds, and yet do not thereby forfeit our control over the circle of our power, why may not God?
4. Does God's sovereignty limit Him to the knowledge He has of the present and future, and which was fore-known from the beginning, or does it consist in that He may know, and come to know, and do as He chooses now?
5. If God has no present freedom, in what does His sovereignty consist?
6. Is it necessary for God to have completed His plan before beginning it?
7. Can the Deity anticipate Himself?

As a tentative hypothesis, then, for a consistent Christian Theodicy, and for the purpose of making more real the Justice as well as the Goodness and Holiness of God, without in any way infringing upon the dignity of His personali-

ty, but on the contrary adding the more glory, it is suggested that the Omniscience of God, while including everything that can be known at this moment, does not invade the future, or if so, only in such a general way as not to over-ride by His fore-knowledge the liberties of individuals, not now in being, or their acts, which must be free, if He be God.

To those who would affirm that this is a limitation on God, it might be replied that there are already limitations upon Him:

1. He cannot cease to be.
2. He is incapable of injustice.
3. He cannot love sin.
4. He cannot anticipate Himself.
5. He cannot contradict Himself.

In confirmation of the reasonableness of a hypothesis that fore-knowledge, as now defined, need not be a correct interpretation of Omniscience, you are invited to the following considerations:

1st. Origen, the first systematic theologian, and one of the ablest of the centuries, took the position that the Deity placed restrictions upon His own prescience that the liberty of the human will might remain unimpaired. He saw that the freedom of the will depended upon an interpretation of Omniscience such that there could be no knowledge ante-dating the acts of free agents.

2nd. The distinguished intellectual and theological successors of Origen, whose respective contributions to the envolving doctrines of our system we have already reviewed, if they did not all affirm so much as Origen, at least claimed the conclusions his logic brought.

3rd. The Personality of God, if properly considered, may throw light on the situation. The distinguishing elements of personality in man are **self-consciousness** and **self-determination**. Shall less than these be ascribed to God? If not, then he is endowed with consciousness and self-determination. It is the self-determination of the Deity which would

seem to make necessary the view of Origen. For if God is to act in the present, He must be free from a knowledge of a **fixed** or **passive** future, that precludes any determinate acts in the **now**.

And this view is as necessary to vindicate the Holiness of God and the efficiency of prayer as it is to establish the free agency of man.

1. The holiness of God is involved when we ascribe to Him the complicity of foreknowledge of wicked events. At a dinner party given in honor of a gentleman of international reputation and author of a book on prayer, one of the guests suggested that this great world war might be, in some way, ordered of the Deity. To which came the quick reply, "Pretty hard on God, don't you think?"

2. The efficacy of prayer is to be found, not in a future fore-known but in a one not yet in the mind of God. For prayer to be effective God must be **able** to answer it. If all of the future is fore-known, how can prayer bring more than a subjective benefit? When the flight of events is but the unrolling of the film of a tragic world picture, how can God change His mind, or act anew, all things being old?

3. Self-determination implies the capacity to change and to act now, without reference to past plans, experience, or knowledge. Has God lost His present power by reason of His past knowledge? Let us see: Dr. W. M. Clow, a Glasgow preacher, author of "The Secret of the Lord," in the chapter on "The Energy of Prayer," says: "In the fourth place: **prayer works on the will of God**. No error has done more to paralyze our faith in prayer and to make the prayer of faith a wistful observance than the strange conception that God is fixed and inexorable law, if not even an iron and inflexible fate. There are many praying men who are fatalists in their hearts. But God is not law, nor is He fate. God is will. The essential truth about will is this, that it is continually forming new plans, making fresh choices and coming to unprophesied decisions. The common

thought of God is that He is a personality bound hand and foot by His laws."

How can these "new plans," "fresh choices," and "unprophesied decisions" obtain in the presence of a fixed or passive foreknowledge? Dr. Clow should have said God is personality, rather than will. He is more than will; He wills. If the world would only believe this today! God can put His hand into the ordered laws of nature so that the miraculous becomes natural. Who can put any limit to a self-determining God's response to prayer?

We need not talk about the "value of God" and the "need of God." Without Him the soul would be an orphan. A godless world is unthinkable. We do not need to study the character of God to know Him and our relation to Him.

A mistaken conception of God leads to false ideas. Fosdick points out what he conceives to be wrong about a certain method of prayer: "The first is the idea that praying is an attempt to secure from God by begging, something which God had not at all intended, or had intended otherwise. But Christian prayer is never that." This position is in contrast to that of the Master in the parable of The Importunate Widow. Besides, Israel was given a king against the judgment of God. We are not limited in our requests, but we are taught to ask believing that we shall receive.

But this is not the only error Mr. Fosdick makes: "Christian prayer is giving God an opportunity to do what He wants, what He has been trying in vain, perhaps for years, to do in our lives, hindered by our unreadiness, our lack of receptivity, our closed hearts and unresponsive minds."

In assuming the inability of God to do what He wants done is a challenge of His omnipotence. And at the same time Mr. Fosdick gives Calvinism a serious blow by his admission that unresponsive man can thwart the wish of Deity. Last of all it makes the origin of prayer to lie in the desire of God rather than the wish of man.

But did God ever change His mind? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made." There was a time, then, when creation had not yet been begun. God came to a conclusion, a new conclusion. Having the power to make a world, He first had the intellect to conceive, the will to execute. What antedated the first appearance of what now is may remain a secret of eternity that futurity may never disclose. But this is certain, there was a time when no sentient being save God inhabited the solitudes of the uncreated. Here He had a new thought. Who dares affirm that all that now appears came full orb'd out of the night of the infinite past?

But God changed his mind again when He thought to blot out the children of Israel,---after Moses prayed. And again when Hezekiah prayed fifteen years were added to his life.

If then self-determination is a fact, if God is a personality, may He not in one moment close up the history of this universe? If, however, absolutely all is fore-known, where is His personality? What becomes of prayer? What of His Holiness, Justice, and Goodness in the presence of vast crimes? Besides, if God can have no new thought what shall break the monotony of His centuries?

Jesus stood at the grave of Lazarus and said: "Loose him and let him go." The business of Methodism today is to take the theological grave clothes of the past centuries from the brow of God. Then may the people of our generation learn the interpretation of prayer given by the Master: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

4. Besides we must reckon with the **sense of freedom** in man. Is this an illusion? And can it be that man is free and yet God is not?

It might be objected, however, that prophecy precludes the consideration of any tentative hypothesis that would modify in the least degree the definition of an absolute fore-

knowledge. In reply it might be inquired if it is of paramount importance to maintain accepted interpretations of prophecy of thereby violence is done to Free Agency, the Efficacy of Prayer, the Justice and Holiness of God? Further it may be suggested:

1st. The greater must include the less. Hence prophecy must be interpreted in the light of God and His attributes, not simply in the light of prophecy.

2nd. Were the prophets not often more than predictors, in the sense that they were ambassadors of God to their age?

3rd. May not that which becomes true following the far off hope of dead saints find some explanation upon the theory of answered prayer? Can any man sever the prayers of Abraham from the assurance which he enjoyed of the coming greatness of posterity? And who shall say that his prayers did not protect his grandson, Joseph, in Potiphar's house as well as cause God to send angels to lead his nephew out of Sodom? Are not the prayers of dead mothers efficacious on the field of France today? Since when has God lost His memory?

4th. Granting that there is a measure of contradiction, shall the present view of prophecy hold if it leads to fatalism? Then too, is the above hypothesis, that makes easy the explanation of miracles, the loved employ of the Master, to have none effect? Besides, has not our great Church the devotion and the intellect to address herself to the work of reconciling any apparent conflict that may exist under present interpretation, with the firm conviction that all truth is self-consistent, and will at last harmonize?

But may we not elucidate the whole matter by drawing two possible theories of the universe?

1st. A Creator in times past made the universe. He had a definite plan as clear as any blue print made by a modern architect from the beginning to the end. In this plan, every being, animal, angel, flowers, and person, would perform a specific mission at a definite time and in an exact way.

Adam would fall, Abraham would become the father of the faithful, Christ would become the Redeemer, Judas would betray Him. Every historic event and every individual among the nations and peoples of the earth, including heathenism, savagery, and barbarism, as well as civilization and Christianity, would contribute their respective parts to a composite whole. War, blood-shed, and death, as well as victory and virtue would lend variety to the the scene, until the solitary purpose of the Creator is at last fulfilled.

2nd. Without the superintendence of priority of any sentient being, in the uncreated and eternal expanse which had been, without cause or thought, incoherent elements appeared or began to be; these by arrangement and re-arrangement under fortuitous laws which began to operate, assumed a more definite shape and form, while these fortuitous laws assumed stability by the process of habit. So that thus in the morning time of material things matter looked forward to the appearance of life, in lowly, then in higher forms; which under the process of the Survival of the Fittest, Selection and Variation, together with the laws of heredity, accounts for the variegated world in which we now find ourselves, but which moves on and on toward no goal other than that each successive age may bring.

Neither of these theories or theories close akin to them, is quite satisfying. The first makes man an automaton. It provides no room for human freedom, or moral responsibility. Nor does it furnish any place for the Justice and Holiness of the Deity, as man, under law, must go to his place in the cogs of the universe. Life and history, the world, and what is, and was, and is to be, is but the Creator's pastime. Fatalism becomes the only religion with the semblance of truth. Prayer can have only a subjective meaning. While, if we are not already assigned to glory, we can have no hope beyond despair.

The second theory, besides being contrary to reason, is refuted by science and religion. The presence of space must first be explained. And the appearance of the first single

element of matter as a phenomenon calls for the same definite explanation as that of a new comet, or solar system. More, for the comet may have been thrown off from an old world, the solar system flung down from out the expanse beyond the vision of the strongest lens. But law, the harmonious, orderly, and axact process, that obtains with reference to all that is seen or known; the seasons, the movement of the respective worlds and systems, defies the doctrine of an unintelligent origin. If there be no intelligent origin, then Chemistry, with a few simple elements has surpassed the most intoxicated juggler, or the most agile wizard, in the multitudinous variety of forms, colors, substances, and combinations---from the pigment in a bride's face to the spots in a leopard's skin, from the artistic touches of the rain-bow to the tiny but effective cilia of the *Paramoecium*.

Last, but not least, the presence of life in any form leaves evolution without a beginning. The philogenetic has no rootage save in the soil already infested with life. The evolving of a different species of the animal kingdom has never been seriously considered as an hypothesis, without assuming the presence of the *Amoeba* family. Life without some ante-dating life has been scientifically disproved. Therefore, the hypothesis of an unmade world becomes at the same time, the imagination of a madman and the deliberate conclusion of a fool.

A third theory of the universe should, then, engage our attention: Somewhere in the infinite past, before the morning stars sang together, yet not before the triune God-head inhabited eternity, a council was held within the solitude of the Uncreated. Here a conception of a world was born in the mind of the Infinite. First, atoms were made and flung forth from the fingers of God into the expanse which He inhabited. These by the law of cohesion which was given to them in the exhilarating moment of their birth, caused them to form into molecules and thus the work of laying the material structure was begun. How it was finished

is seen by the sun, moon, stars and milky-way. Creatures with life appeared to feed upon the gorgeous vegetation that covered the landscapes while still the earth was warm. But after all, amidst the beautiful world that He has made, God grew lonely. Robinson Crusoe was sad until he saw the foot-print of Friday on the sand of the sea shore; Robinson Crusoe was made in the image of God and his heart yearned for companionship. There could be no Eden for God without fellowship, and so God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness."

Having decided to make man in His own image, there was no alternative but to endow him with freedom and leave him to the unfettered exercise thereof. Not being able to make him free and at the same time determine his course, God could not know what this one like unto Himself would do. It was a real, not a fictitious option made to Adam--either road was his for the taking. Yet, out of the goodness of the Divine heart a contingent provision for redemption was planned should he take the evil road. So grace comes to every heart,---enough to incline, not enough to overcome---that man may be saved yet still be free.

The restraint of God upon Himself to keep the original purpose He had made, to leave man free, is seen today as we witness a mad world bent upon destruction. Omnipotence, without over-riding the human will, but by His persistent appeal to the hearts of free men will yet save the world from being ditched in destruction.

It is more to the ideas of this third proposition that we hold. This view places no Divine mortgage upon the rights of mankind. God is not made past history by a futurity which he cannot recall, modify, or subdue. This does not make His Omniscience to consist in the fact that He has no present and no future; that no new thought can come, no new emotion stir, no unexpected change of events bring rapture to the Divine breast. Is man alone to be endowed with the surprises of time and the adventures of eternity, while the Maker impassive lives amidst the monotonous

scenes He created ages ago, and thus grows weary with **ennui** as the passing show goes on?

Our Church has done much to deliver man from the bondage of unfaith, let us now deliver God from theologic contradictions, and thus make clean and secure the Holiness of the Divine Government. If she will extend her borders a little further and just where she has felt the need most, she has the golden key to unlock the store-house of Divine truth and give to the world its long waited for Theodicy.

Wesley's name is written in marble by the side of the dignitaries of a great Empire in an historic Abbey; Napoleon rests in a sarcophagus, the gift of the French people, under the dome of the Invalides in the Capital of the French. But a greater dignity awaits him, whether he sleeps under cathedral spires or under the clinging arbutus of the country church-yard, whose epitaph reads:

He Discovered a More Perfect Theodicy
of
The Divine Government of His God.

Affection is the mightiest fact in the realm of sentiment; Truth is the highest intellectual achievement. Let us seek them both!